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ABSTRACT

Findings of a study that explored the implications of school restructuring on the changing role of the principal are presented in this paper. Methodology involved a 4-year case study of an elementary school's restructuring effort in a moderately sized suburban school district. The school, located in a district that possessed adequate resources, was involved in a reform program that included parental choice and implementation of a theme of school-community partnerships. Data were derived from document analysis and interviews with the principal, superintendent, four central office administrators, the school's theme facilitator, and the school's leadership council chair. Findings support the assertion that district-led restructuring reshapes the context for school leadership with an observable impact on the role expectations for principals. School-based leaders must develop their public relations and collaborative skills to carry out their new environmental and instructional leadership roles. (13 references) (LMI)

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The Changing Role of the Principal in Schools of Choice: A Longitudinal Case Study

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The Changing Role of the Principal in Restructured Schools:

A Longitudinal Case Study

Abstract

In this paper, we examine an effort to restructure the elementary schools in a moderately sized, suburban school district. The school system is a multi-ethnic district that faces many of the challenges that confront school districts throughout the country. What makes this case especially interesting for observers of education reform is that this school district possesses many of the resources -- human and fiscal -- that are absent in other systems intent on school restructuring. Over the past four years, this district has engaged in a reform program that includes school-based management, shared decision-making and parental choice.

This report focuses on the changing role of the elementary school principals in light of this restructuring effort. Prior commentary has suggested that trends toward teacher and parent empowerment and the decentralization of decision-making change the context in which leadership is exercised in schools. This case study draws on four years of data collected primarily through interviews with key staff at the school site to explore how the leaders in one elementary school have adapted to this school system's education policy reforms.

The specific focus of this paper is on the implementation of the school's theme of *school-community partnerships* and the impact of this thematic approach on the principal's role. The findings of this single case study support the belief that district-led restructuring reshapes the context for school leadership with an observable impact on the role expectations for principals. It further suggests some of the leadership capacities school-based leaders will need to successfully manage complex curricular reforms as well as increased parental involvement in schools.

Recognition that our current system of education is not adequately preparing students has led policymakers, administrators, teachers, and parents to reexamine the assumptions that underlie traditional methods and structures of schooling. This search for better methods of education received impetus from the Carnegie Report on Education and the Economy (1986), which stated that fundamental changes are needed in the goals, organizational structures, and professional roles in American schooling. Consequently, the commission which developed this report recommended decentralization of authority from the school district to the school site, an expanded professional role for teachers in the decision-making process, and increased opportunities for active learning by students. Subsequently, numerous school districts throughout the country have begun to *restructure*.

The grass roots nature of this phenomenon has resulted in school districts implementing a wide range of activities under the rubric of *school restructuring*. Writing in the *New York Times*, Fiske observed:

> American education has a new buzzword: restructuring. It's not exactly clear what the term means. Indeed, everyone who uses it seems to have something different in mind. The common thread appears to be that recent efforts to improve public education have fallen short and that drastic new strategies are necessary (1990, B6).

Site-specific variations in school restructuring reflect the realities of implementing an ambiguously defined, grass-roots innovation. The absence of a common definition for restructuring is, however, an impediment for those who are interested in understanding the exigencies of implementation as well as the effects of school restructuring. At this stage in the current reform cycle, practitioners and policymakers can benefit from contextualized descriptions of the experiences of schools and districts as they implement their localized conceptions of school restructuring (Murphy & Hallinger, 1992).

This is particularly apparent in the efforts of researchers and practitioners to understand the types of leadership capacities that principals and teacher leaders need to succeed in these new educational settings (Crow, in press; Goldring, 1992; Hallinger, 1992a; Leithwood, 1992). Clearly, the concepts of school choice, teacher empowerment and school-based management represent new organizational arrangements in which school leaders must function. For example, Goldring (1992) has noted:

> Principals of schools of choice in Israel face increasingly complex role definitions. . . . It is clear from an external management point of view these principals face very uncertain, complex environments. They are almost totally dependent upon external constituencies for their own survival, as well as the survival of their schools. . . . Consequently, these principals under an extremely high amount of external uncertainty, are expected to create professional, pluralistic schools, almost to prove that the bureaucratic work settings of the past can be transformed. . . .

Such pressures and resulting expectations suggest that principals and other leaders at the

school site will need leadership skills that go beyond those delineated in the effective schools research of the 1980s. Leithwood (1992) has expressed this belief:

> Evocative images of desirable practice are powerful guides for action without prescribing exactly what that action ought to be. "Instructional leadership" is one such image for school administration: it is an image that has served well the needs of many schools through the 1980s and early 1990s. Given the substance of current restructuring initiatives designed to take schools into the twenty-first century, however. . ., I argue that "transformational leadership" evokes a more appropriate range of practice. . . .

Consistent with Leithwood's admonition, we believe that such images of successful leadership in restructured schools will have to be grounded in practice. It is critical that our understanding of leadership at the school-site take full cognizance of the difficulties entailed in fundamental reform. Thus, our focus in this paper is on the initial implementation process at one elementary school in a school district that is presently engaged in restructuring its schools.

We examine one of the district-initiated policy reforms -- the implementation of controlled parental choice and school themes. Our primary purpose is to understand how the implementation of an interrelated program of school choice and magnet themes is influencing the context for leadership at the school site. More specifically, we explore how the leaders in one school have responded to this challenge over the course of one year of planning and approximately three years of implementation. In light of this analysis, we discuss dilemmas faced by the school's principal in implementing the district's vision of school restructuring and implications for the role of the principal under these changing organizational conditions.

Context for the Research

In this paper, we examine the initial efforts to restructure the elementary schools in one moderately-sized, suburban, school district. This school system's experience is noteworthy for several reasons. First, it is a multi-ethnic, socio-economically stratified district that faces many of the challenges of urban schools. The school district serves a large minority (approximately 50%) student population, many of whom live in clusters of low income housing. Unlike many urban school systems, however, this district also possesses an impressive array of human and fiscal resources. The city is also ringed by several large corporate and industrial parks whose occupants pay high levels of school taxes (i.e., well over $10,000 per pupil annually).

Second, this district's program of school restructuring includes three features often discussed in the recent education reform literature:

1. *school-based management*, i.e., decentralization of authority from the central office to the school;

2. a structured *shared decision-making process* at each school site including the principal, teachers, all non-teaching staff, and parents;
3. a system of *parental choice* concerning pupil attendance at the different elementary schools in the district.

Finally, this case contrasts with some widely publicized instances in which school districts have offered individual schools the opportunity to restructure if they so desired (e.g., Miami-Dade County Schools). The school system that is the subject of this research has sought to restructure the educational process through a systematic district-wide approach. This suggests the potential for adding to our understanding of the district's role in educational reform (Cuban, 1990; Fullan, 1992; Tyack, 1990). The confluence of these three features led us to view this particular reform effort as a particularly useful case for furthering our understanding of how school restructuring unfolds in practice.

Restructuring the Bridgewater[3] Schools

In February, 1988, the Bridgewater Board of Education approved an ambitious plan for restructuring the school system. Among the key features of the plan were:

1. a stringent policy on racial and ethnic balance of individual schools;
2. a student assignment plan that would be implemented through a controlled parents' choice program;
3. a commitment from the Board of Education and the superintendent to decentralize significant decision-making authority to the building level;
4. a related commitment to re-orient central office functions so that they reinforce and support school-based initiatives;
5. the creation at each of the school buildings of a shared decision-making structure and set of procedures designed to insure that all appropriate parties participate equitably in making educational decisions.

In addition to these features, the plan included the closing of one existing school building, the opening of another, major construction and renovation at all buildings, and the reconfiguration of the district's grade structure.

In order for "restructuring" to become anything more than a slogan, there must be real incentives for people in schools (and in the community) to give up what is known and comfortable and to invest serious time and energy in the development of new -- perhaps risky -- alternatives. Why should they?

The major motivator in this situation was the community's commitment to the development of a viable and effective way to maintain a comparable ethnic balance in each of its elementary schools. The other elements -- the parents' choice program, the decentralization, the site-based decision making and the facility changes -- were piggy-backed onto the new ethnic balance policy.

The logic behind the overall strategy for restructuring undertaken by the district can be delineated into the following five elements:

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1. To achieve the desired high standard of ethnic balance, a controlled parents' choice plan was adopted.
2. If parents were to make choices among the elementary schools, there needed to be some programmatic basis for the choices, not simply geographical convenience or the reputation of the principal or teachers.
3. Rather than having the focus of each school determined by a needs assessment conducted centrally, it was decided that each school should initiate a building-based process for defining its mission and programmatic emphasis (i.e., *theme*).
4. To provide incentives for school staffs and parents to invest seriously in this grass-roots program definition/development process, the schools needed to be given considerable latitude and discretion.
5. If important decisions about educational programs were to be decentralized to the school level, there needed to be a structure and process in place at each building to insure that these decisions would be made in a participatory manner.

Restructuring the District: An Overview of the Process

Shortly after the multi-faceted restructuring plan was approved by the Board, a large representative district-wide committee was established to develop the specific components. Two of the committee's key tasks were:

1. to design a viable mechanism for decentralizing decision-making to the building level, and
2. to develop a credible and effective process for shared decision-making at each elementary building.

The first task has been extremely difficult, and three years into the implementation process, staff members are still trying to delineate clearly which decisions are in the domain of the schools and which ones are to be retained centrally. While continuing to struggle with this task, the district has made more substantial progress in achieving the second goal: the design and implementation of a procedure for shared decision-making at the building level. Following two years of planning, the Board of Education formally passed a new policy which established School Leadership Councils (SLC's) at each elementary school building. Several provisions of this policy are salient to our discussion of how restructuring has affected the roles of school principals.

1. Councils are comprised of nine people (principal, 4 teachers, 4 parents, one nonteaching staff member); they have the option of increasing membership up to 15 people; except for the principal, all members are elected by their respective constituencies.
2. There must be an equal number of parents and staff on the Council.
3. The chair of the Council is elected by the members; during the initial year, the principal could not be the chair. (To date, all of the Leadership Councils in our study have been chaired by teachers.)
4. Decisions are to be made by consensus whenever possible, or at least by a 75% majority vote of the membership.
5. The principal may veto a decision, but that veto may be overridden by a 75% vote of

the membership.
6. Meetings are public, with agendas prepared and distributed prior to the meetings. The minutes of the meetings are widely distributed.
7. Meeting times for the Council are staggered so that no particular constituency is consistently inconvenienced more than others.

The Councils were formed at the end of the 1988-89 school year. The district provided two days of orientation and training to the SLC's in June, 1989. Although several Councils met for a day or two during the summer, they really did not begin regular meetings until school was underway in September. To date, the Councils have been functioning for approximately three years.

These comprise the basic characteristics of the district-wide effort to restructure the schools. As noted, the district-initiated and multi-faceted nature of this plan to increase the professional autonomy of individual schools make this an interesting example of restructuring.

Methodology

The findings reported in this paper are drawn from a four year case study of one school district's efforts to restructure its schools.[4] The lead author has been involved in the school district's restructuring program from its inception. In the initial year of district-wide planning, he acted as an external resource person for the school system. During the subsequent three years of school-based implementation, he has been engaged in collecting data on the implementation process in two of the district's elementary schools and in the central office. As noted, this case study examines one of those elementary schools.

The data presented here are descriptive and therefore, suitable for generating hypotheses rather than for testing them. Given the sparse empirical literature on school restructuring, we believe that researchers and practitioners will benefit from contextualized descriptions of efforts in progress. Thus, our goal here is to clarify and extend issues that have been raised during the initial stages of research and practice in school restructuring.

Data Collection and Analysis

Two modes of data collection were used to produce the data-set for this analysis: informant interviews and document analysis. The interviews were held on-site at the schools and typically lasted between 45 minutes and one and one-half hours. Most were audio-taped and subsequently transcribed. The findings presented in this paper are drawn from the following interviews conducted over a three year period (1989-90, 1990-91, 1991-92):

1. 11 interviews with the principal(s);
2. 12 interviews with the superintendent;
3. single interviews with each of four other central office administrators;
4. two interviews with the school's *theme facilitator*;
5. annual interviews with the chair of the school's leadership council.

The interviews had a dual evolving focus. Initially, we sought to elicit the individuals' personal understandings and conceptions of the purposes of restructuring, i.e., why engage in this time consuming process? This phase of interview questions sought to have the principals describe both what restructuring meant to them and the desired effects on the school, staff, and students. Semi-structured and open-ended questions were asked during this stage. We were interested here in finding out what the principals' visions of their schools might be five years from now and how they thought restructuring would enable them to make their vision reality.

The second focus for the interviews concerned the implementation process. Here, we started by attempting to develop an understanding of each school's history and culture. We also gathered background information on the informants themselves. This led, over time, into questions designed to generate descriptions of the implementation process as experienced and perceived by the participants. Each of the major components of the district's reform agenda -- shared decision-making, school-based management, and parent choice -- represented a domain for questions. Increasingly, over the three year period, we moved to open-ended questions with probes to assess the processes and impact of restructuring on the roles of the participants and on more general school and district-level processes.

Analysis of the interview transcripts proceeded through two stages. First, the content of the individual interviews was read to identify emergent patterns and themes. As analysis proceeded, cross-role comparison identified additional themes and dilemmas arising from conflicting perceptions. This led to a reanalysis of the original sources and concurrently to alternate data sources (e.g., school documents). The longitudinal nature of the study further allowed us to recheck developing themes with individuals during subsequent interviews.

The second set of data analyzed for the purpose of this paper consisted of school documents related to the implementation of the school's restructuring effort. These included the agendas and minutes for the monthly meetings of the school's Leadership Council for each of the three years of implementation, the school's parent handbook (revised annually), copies of the school's annual school improvement plan, and a series of planning papers written by the superintendent on the district's restructuring program. These documents were analyzed primarily to checks patterns that arose from the analysis of the interviews. For example, at various points during the three years, informants made statements about the Leadership Council's purposes. Analysis of trends in the nature of meeting topics, time allocation to categories of topics, and decisions made by the Council provided an additional data source by which to check the perceptions of the participants. These data also served as a second means for generating themes.

Case Study

In this section of the paper, we present data on how the district's implementation of controlled parental choice and the associated magnet theme has proceeded in one elementary school. We begin by briefly describing the school context. We then focus on the principals and discuss how their activities and perceptions have evolved during the three years of implementation. We pay particular attention to the goals of the school related to

the theme and the transition from the traditional school model to the choice/magnet model.

The School Context

Eastside Elementary School is a K-5 school that serves approximately 500 students. Like several of the other elementary schools in the district, it has recently converted from a K-4 to a K-5 grade format. Its racial/ethnic distribution of students is currently 19% Hispanic, 49% Anglo, 30% Black, and 2% Asian. The socioeconomic distribution spans from low SES to high SES.

The school, which is housed in a three-story brick building typical of urban schools built in the 1930s, is located in a commercial zone in town. The facility is well-maintained. During the course of this research, the school was engaged in an ambitious renovation program. The impact of the reconstruction during the simultaneous implementation of the district restructuring cannot be understated. The extent of the principal's time commitment to the building expansion during the first year of this study led him to comment that at times he felt "like an architect" (September, 1989). The construction was concluded in October of the third year of the study (i.e., 1991).

The teaching staff. The staff of 35 teachers has been quite stable over the past decade. Most have been at Eastside for more than 10 years and almost all have tenure. There are numerous special area teachers and support personnel (e.g., art, P.E., library, psychologist, science, social worker, assistant principal).

With the advent of the district restructuring, several new leadership positions were created in the school. For example, several teachers and parents now serve on the School Leadership Council (SLC). In practice at Eastside, the SLC Chair has, thus far, been held exclusively by teachers. In addition, the school chose to use some of its state magnet funds to create the position of *theme facilitator*. This is a half-time position that has been filled by a special area teacher. She is charged with assisting in the development and implementation of the school's magnet theme: school-community partnerships.

The principals. Two principals have led Eastside Elementary School during the four and one-half year period encompassed in this research (i.e., from planning through implementation). During the planning years and the first year of implementation, Jack Cameron was the principal at Eastside Elementary School. He retired at the conclusion of the 1989-90 school year and was succeeded by Peter O'Hara.

Jack Cameron served as principal at Eastside for 13 years. Previously, he had been principal of another elementary school in the district for 10 years. Cameron had worked in every school in the district over the course of his career and was an influential force in the school district. He acted as negotiator of the principal's bargaining unit and had once served as president of the state administrators' association. He took great pride in his school and was concerned about maintaining its tradition of educational excellence.

With respect to his leadership style, Cameron admitted to being a directive principal

who was used to *making the decisions*. He jokingly described his leadership orientation as being like "Atilla the Hun," though he claimed that under the current district restructuring he had become "more like Mary had a little lamb" (September, 1989). This contrast in styles reflects the wholesale change in expectations experienced by Cameron under the new district policies. In fact, the new role requirements were such that Cameron decided to retire at the end of the first year of implementation of the district's restructuring program.

Cameron was succeeded by Peter O'Hara at the start of the 1991-92 school year. In his early 40s, O'Hara came to Eastside from a nearby city's public schools where he had served as an elementary school principal for several years. Many of O'Hara's perceptions of events at Eastside were colored by his prior experience in this urban environment, which has clearly served as a reference point for him. His school in the city served an extremely poor neighborhood. Although his former school did not have anywhere near the level of resources available at Eastside, O'Hara was proud of having had a hand in turning the school around.

By O'Hara's attribution, his success in the city was due, in part, to the extensive involvement of his teachers in school-wide educational decisions. This was, in fact, one of the characteristics that led to his selection as the new principal at Eastside. For us, as researchers, the succession of principals made it possible to observe how principals with contrasting experiences, leadership styles, and personal values responded to the challenges and opportunities of school restructuring. This lent both complexity and richness to the case study.

Parental Choice and the School's Theme

In this section, we describe the theme incorporated by the school under the magnet school/controlled choice plan instituted district-wide at the elementary level. We also examine both the principal's role in implementation of the theme and the perceived impact of this reform on the role of the principal.

Assumptions of the thematic approach. We noted previously that individual schools were given the responsibility for developing their own *themes*. The assumptions underlying the thematic approach were twofold. First, it was assumed that the process of developing school-specific themes would energize the professional expertise and creativity of the staff. This, in turn, would result in greater staff motivation and ownership of the school's educational program.

The second assumption was that themes would make schools distinctive, thereby appealing to differing value orientations within parents in the community. The distinctiveness of the magnet school programs would attract students from various parts of the district, reducing the ethnic imbalance inherent under the traditional scheme of neighborhood schools. The reader should remember that the district's first motivation for undertaking the restructuring effort was to address ethnic imbalance in student assignment across the elementary schools in a positive manner.

The experience of the district thus far suggests that ethnic imbalance is being addressed

successfully through the program of controlled parent choice. Distribution of students by race/ethnicity has been equalized among the elementary schools. All parents are getting one of their top two choices of elementary schools. While parental choice has apparently solved the problem of ethnic imbalance, our data are less clear concerning the goal of restructuring the teaching and learning process through the development of school themes. We consider this and related issues in the following sections.

Eastside's school theme. Eastside has adopted as its theme the concept of *school-community partnerships*. This reflects the school's desire to connect its educational program offered to students with the community outside of school. The selection of this theme also reflects the staff's desire for students to develop a stronger awareness of their responsibilities to society as well as to each other. Moreover, faculty were apparently interested in making the application of knowledge a higher priority in the curriculum. Finally, the staff believed that these partnerships would provide an opportunity to take fuller advantage of untapped community resources.

Toward this end, partnerships have been developed with local businesses (e.g., a major department store, television studio, nursing home, and a real estate firm) and public institutions (e.g., the public library). Each community partnership was developed with a specific grade level.

Teachers work with staff from their community partner to develop curriculum applications related to the partner's business. These curriculum units then form the basis for partnership activities. At times, students go out to the partner's location; at other times, employees from the partner's organization come to the school.

The Principal's Role in Implementing the School Theme

Two features of the school choice component of the reform have influenced the role of the principals: 1) the distribution of students to schools via the choice plan and 2) the adoption of school themes. The redistribution of students to schools via parent choice has meant that parents have become more active participants in one of the most basic decisions that affects the education of their child, the choice of elementary school. Students in the district are no longer assigned to schools on the basis of neighborhood or other catchment area.

Under the new process, parents are provided information about the schools on which to base their decisions. Written information is coordinated through a central Parent Information Center which also processes the choices in a manner that will maintain the desired ethnic balance across elementary schools in the district. The most important information obtained by parents, however, appears to come directly from the schools through site visitations. In our descriptions below, we will address how this process has been handled by both principals.

The second issue concerns the nature of the themes adopted by schools as a means of *product differentiation*. Although the engine driving this district's restructuring effort is the need for ethnic balance, the desire to improve teaching and learning is a concomitant

goal. It seems that conceptual differences in the way in which the school personnel, especially the principals, have conceived of their themes has a significant impact on implementation.

Although our focus here is on a single school, we would note that the approach taken by principals towards the role of the school's theme has varied dramatically across schools. Interestingly, at Eastside, principal succession afforded an opportunity to observe how two different principals in the same setting would approach the implementation of the partnership theme. In this section of the paper, we consider how each of these aspects of restructuring (i.e., choice/magnet theme) has influenced the role of the principal(s) in this school.

Jack Cameron: Initial implementation of the choice/magnet theme. The adoption of parental choice has had several effects on the principal's role, some quite obvious, others more subtle. Initially, a lot of effort went into the development of brochures and other written information about the school. More time-consuming, however, has been a new version of a traditional school ritual: the school tour for prospective parents.

Traditionally, principals have greeted parents who were new to the community or school and provided them a tour of the school. Although such tours have always been time-consuming, the number of such tours were generally limited. Now, however, the initiation of the choice plan has meant that principals may give over 100 tours to parents faced with a decision on which school to send their child. This is in addition to more large-group parent meetings.

Thus, there is a completely new emphasis (and pressure) for principals to obtain and retain students for their school. Cameron elaborated:

> There is no doubt about it. We are more competitive, and I happen to believe in competition. I spoke at the parent association meeting two weeks ago. . . we now set up a schedule where we say these are the days visitors may come to the school; now, there are ten full days and two nights. I do this myself; I have to sell the school, the atmosphere. . . (January, 1989)

This led Jack Cameron to comment that under the new system, "You become more of a manager of people and more of a public relations artist" (Sept. 1, 1989). This illustrates an increased sensitivity to the demands of parental choice as well as the complexities involved in working with parents in new decision-making roles. This complexity is exacerbated because while being confronted with such localizing forces as empowerment, shared decision-making, and choice, principals must also react to opposing centralizing tendencies mandated at the district, state, and federal levels.

The idea of having individual school themes was conceived at the central office level as a vehicle to address ethnic imbalance. However, Jack Cameron's perspective on the substance and purpose of the school's magnet theme was stated quite clearly and differently. He felt that it was of paramount importance that the theme not interfere with his school's

educational program. Thus, he asserted:

> [W]e are committed to computer education; we are committed to science. We have a state syllabus for social studies that must be taught, a language arts curriculum.... We have to be an academic school, as does every school in the district, because we're all feeding into one school. . . , but what we do extra will be the curricular changes. Thus, at Eastside, the partnership theme will result in moving the children into the community (e.g., adopting senior citizens) and relating the experiences to the basic curriculum. (September, 1989)

The sentiment that the role of the school theme was to *enhance* the basic educational program was congruent with his belief that the school was already doing an outstanding job of educating its students. He was determined not to let this curricular innovation dilute Eastside's tradition of excellence. As he noted, "[Our school] scored the highest in the city in science on state tests. We're not going to give up the academic standards we have" (May, 1989).

Thus, the traditionally high levels of student performance at Eastside influenced both the goal and substance of the principal's approach to implementation of the choice/magnet plan at Eastside. Since activities designed to implement the theme at Eastside were primarily viewed as *extras* or *add-ons* during Cameron's tenure, it was unlikely that the basic curriculum of the school or the predominant methods of classroom instruction would change in significant ways. On the contrary, as we have already noted, one of his primary concerns was to protect the school's basic curriculum from threats of dilution and decreased standards. Therefore, under Cameron's leadership, the goal of the restructuring was to improve incrementally a traditionally successful instructional program by appending the partnerships theme.

As leader of the school, Jack Cameron was therefore cautious. He implicitly viewed his role as a *buffer* -- protecting the school's core program from potentially unfriendly influences -- and as a *renovator* -- examining how the district's interest in restructuring could be scaffolded onto the school's current program. Thus, implementation of the partnership theme at Eastside initially proceeded in a manner that was consistent with the district's magnet guidelines, and its limited scope increased the potential for successful implementation. However, the clearly delimited boundaries of Jack Cameron's vision also represented a limitation in terms of the theme's potential for fundamental changes in student learning.

Although the school only engaged in one year of implementation of the restructuring under Jack Cameron's leadership, two points can be made here. First, his clearly bounded vision of the theme's role in the school was significantly less ambitious than the vision of transformed schooling delineated by the superintendent and supported by the school board in its restructuring of district policy. The superintendent, in particular, viewed the theme-building aspect of the restructuring as a key mechanism by which to engage teachers in reexamining educational practice in the district. The process of creating a school theme

would, it was hoped, lead to the development of a more collaborative school culture and ultimately to the successful implementation of more powerful and complex curricula and methods of instruction.

Second, the boundaries of Jack Cameron's vision for the theme had a demonstrable influence on the implementation effort. Planning during the first year was sporadic and little pressure or support was provided for teachers to engage in the type of curriculum redesign necessary for a full integration of the theme into the curricular and instructional programs. The school was meeting the letter of the district's mandate, but not its intent. Of course, this was only the first year in a comprehensive change process, so we would not expect to see full-scale implementation so soon. Nonetheless, the principal's values concerning the needs of the school and his power base among the faculty seemed sufficiently strong to insulate the school's program from the theme for some time to come.

In fact, Jack Cameron retired at the end of the first year of implementation. The stresses that accompanied the various components of the restructuring program proved more than he chose to contend with. The increased involvement of teachers and parents in decision-making, escalating pressures to *sell* the school, and the perceived threats to the program he had helped build at Eastside created a very different context for principal leadership: one in which Jack Cameron was clearly uncomfortable.

Following Cameron's retirement, The SLC was charged by the superintendent with assisting in the selection of a new principal. After an extensive selection process, Peter O'Hara was chosen to succeed Jack Cameron.

Peter O'Hara: Adapting tradition and reform. Like Jack Cameron, Peter O'Hara has had to make a substantial adjustment to the restructured school setting. The choice component of the restructuring plan has meant many more hours interacting with parents individually and in groups. Ironically, two and one-half years into the implementation of the choice program he made an interesting observation.

> [T]he theme as part of parents' choice is really minimal. ... What they're [parents] really interested in is the second half of the presentation, which is about the typical kindergarten day, what that means to their child, and what we have to offer down the line in terms of support services. . . I'll stop at the end of this formal presentation. . . and there are no questions. I think that I've had one question as it relates to the theme in twenty sessions. (March, 1992)

In reflecting further on this issue, O'Hara reiterated the belief that parents do not seem to be making their choice of school based on the theme. He noted that although they currently have up to one hundred parental visits, an atypically high number of parental visits in a traditional school district, "you just don't get the kind of probing questions that you might expect from parents who are making, supposedly making, a choice of school based at least partially on the theme" (March, 1992). Despite this impression, O'Hara noted that prospective parents who visited several of the schools and then came back to Eastside

claimed that they did see differences in the schools, though the differences were not clearly related to the themes.

With respect to the nature of the theme, Peter O'Hara's conception of the partnership theme differs substantially from Jack Cameron's. O'Hara believes "the theme should be driving what we do," and ultimately, "...it [the theme] will lead to where it should be, which is an integrated curriculum; and that's going to take a lot of effort and time" (December, 1991). His vision of the partnership theme entails fundamental changes in the way that curriculum and instruction is delivered at Eastside. Rather than using the theme to merely add-on to the existing curriculum, O'Hara views the theme as a tool to revamp the teaching and learning process.

> Kids are now beginning to experience a more holistic approach which is helpful, because our curriculum is being bombarded by infusions. 'This has got to be included; that has got to be included. . .' so what's happening is that it's all vertical inserts and what we need to try to get across to people are horizontal connections. I think the theme is beginning to do that in short and small ways. . . but I think it will eventually lead to an integrated curriculum. (March, 1991)

In fact, O'Hara sees the theme as a vehicle for influencing both the cognitive and affective outcomes for children. He noted that exposure to adults outside the school provides a very different forum for student learning. growing. For example, the first grade's partnership is with a nursing home where students interact on a regular basis with senior citizens. Here, the curricular emphasis is explicitly on both cognitive and affective tasks.

In order to achieve his broader vision of restructuring, O'Hara has attempted to organize the school improvement plan around the theme. As an instructional leader, his focus in the two years he has been at Eastside has been on framing and communicating a guiding vision for the integration of the theme into general school improvement planning. When pressed to describe the relationship between the school's improvement plan and the theme, he responded:

> The school plan basically encompasses or will include all of the initiatives in the school, as it relates to connecting what's going on in various programs in classrooms to the theme of that particular grade. . . . the umbrella theme, which is education through partnerships, is a broad amorphous topic, but what it does is it allows people to use that framework to guide them as they make their lessons. (March, 1992)

O'Hara later added, "Originally, the plan was broader than the theme. People are now moving the other way" (March, 1992). Thus, the theme has been placed in a pivotal position for school improvement. He further expressed the hope that:

> we move towards. . . looking at the school plan, redesigning

> the school plan, making the curricular linkages that we need at this point. ... all the different grades are going to get together and begin to look at how we can link what's going on in the theme with our objectives. . . and then we're going to follow through with other half-days with each grade level through the course of the year. We'll have some sense that there is a connection. . . (March, 1991)

Consistent with his beliefs, as principal of Eastside, Peter O'Hara has functioned as a *catalyst* and *enabler*. He has viewed his role as providing the resources necessary for his staff to draw upon for implementation of the theme. The strength of the thematic implementation under O'Hara's leadership has been the potential to positively alter some of the attitudes and structures (e.g., planning time) at Eastside. As one might predict, observable changes in curriculum and instructional practices have proceeded slowly and have varied greatly across grade levels. In the following section, we consider some of the issues that seem to have influenced both the general implementation of the theme and the principals' role.

Implementation issues for teachers. Although the district's restructuring plan has had the support of most stakeholders in the district, its ambitious scope has encountered varying degrees of resistance, particularly among the largely veteran staff. During the planning years and the first year of implementation, a common refrain heard among teachers was, "Why is this district reorganization going to be any different from the previous ones?" Given the veteran teaching staff in the school system, there was a strong and everpresent institutional memory.

Eastside was no exception. Teacher skepticism of the need to change, especially on the part of experienced staff members, has been a difficult obstacle to overcome. O'Hara has addressed this difficulty:

> A lot of the older staff members, people who have been in the building for a long time, still [after two years] are not quite convinced of the need to change. They're not saying you shouldn't do it. They're not picketing, but there's not the enthusiasm on their part.... Some of the staff say let's do it; this is great. The kids have changed. . . , so let's see if we can come up with a better package for the kids. Unfortunately, there is that kind of tendency that my formula has been successful for 25 years; the people coming to my room go out well prepared. Why do I have to make the change? (January, 1991)

During the subsequent years of implementation (i.e., years two and three), there has been less overt reference by teachers to the past reorganizations. This has, however, been replaced with an attitude on the part of much of the teaching staff at Eastside that the district must prove its sincerity in the reform effort. On an almost continuous basis, the veteran teachers test the decisions of the administration (central office or the principal) against their belief that the reform is another ploy to get more work out of them.

The implementation challenge has not, however, focused solely on the veteran teachers. O'Hara has also noted the difficulty of integrating new teachers to the thematic approach. The veteran teachers are not the only ones who have not been trained in more complex instructional strategies such as cooperative learning and peer tutoring. The need for novice teachers to learn these approaches as they attempt simultaneously to master the basics of teaching has led to increased anxiety.

Regarding teacher anxiety, O'Hara believes the district can significantly reduce it. He stressed the importance of building additional time into the school day for planning.

> You need to give time to people, and you can't necessarily reimburse people in terms of money... It's got to be time during the school day. It's got to be that commitment on the part of the school district in order for it [theme implementation] to work. Then, I think you may see some easing up of the anxieties about being involved. (March, 1991)

The school's theme facilitator also believed that she could help to minimize teachers' anxieties. She felt that her first responsibility was to provide a clear conception of the theme so that the teachers could see the structure and validity of it, thereby providing them an incentive to buy into it. She described her role with the following observations.

> [In the first year] there was really no form to it [the theme], and people had to see something. Therefore, the first part of my year was spent just developing concrete partnerships so each grade level could see that they had something. Then, the something had to be integrated into the curriculum. (December, 1991)

Interestingly, the theme facilitator often felt "at loggerheads" with the regular classroom teachers. Varying interpretations of the theme abounded and led to conflicts and frustrations over the use of resources allocated for the new program. She summarized this frustration by stating:

> "I feel oftentimes there's partnerships and <u>partnerships</u>. You can't call everything a partnership, and that's what I find when somebody wants something they say 'oh we can do it because it's a partnership.' To me that's just a way of rationalizing." (December, 1991)

Gradually, over a three year period, the focus on the theme and the awareness of its potential have intensified. The analysis of the minutes of the school's Leadership Council showed a clear pattern during the first two years of a disparate focus. The SLC was unable to effectively marshall its energy and resources toward implementation of the theme. As the theme facilitator noted:

> "Our focus, judging from the minutes, is [now] much more

> instructional and not just nitty gritty stuff that. . . we don't have to waste our time with. But, [initially] we were so confused in our new sense of power in shared decision-making that we might have talked about the plumbing" (December, 1991).

Some probable reasons for this change include the leadership of the theme facilitator and principal, additional common planning time for same grade level teachers, and a greater number of more informal discussions among the faculty(e.g., during lunch, before and after school). In part, it has also been the result of additional staff experience in working together to make educational decisions. To overcome the staff's fear of failure and encourage risk-taking, O'Hara has consistently communicated, "If it doesn't work, it's not that it failed. It just didn't meet the needs of the kids at that point, so you try something else" (September, 1990).

It has been a slow and challenging process for the theme to be integrated into the curriculum, even to the extent that has been reached to date. After two years of effort, O'Hara predicted, "It's going to be at least two more years for it [the theme] to become a natural part of the curriculum, a natural part of the way people think" (March, 1991). Although progress has been made, the theme has yet to achieve full maturity. The greatest obstacle to overcome is likely the challenge of articulating the theme across grade levels. Presently, the theme implementation is almost exclusively horizontal, with some grade levels significantly farther along in the process than others.

A greater awareness of the theme's potential is only now beginning to influence teachers and students. O'Hara has observed:

> They [teachers] are talking together. They're planning together. They're validating each other's suggestions and ideas. . . , and that's great. We're breaking down the old four walls type thing. . . . not only does it [the theme] give the teachers a reason to examine their present practices, but it also gives us an opportunity to take the larger district, . . . , and use that as a guide as we look at the partnerships we're doing. Are we doing something for the sake of doing something differently, or is it having an impact on our kids? I think this has given people an opportunity to not only think about it themselves but to work with their colleagues. (March, 1992)

In addition to the incremental increase in cooperative planning and reflective behavior among the teachers at Eastside, O'Hara also believes the theme is partly responsible for a greater use of instructional strategies such as cooperative learning, peer tutoring, and whole language. To the extent that this is the case, it is significant since these methods are believed to be more effective with the school's diverse student population. As expressed in the following statement, he credits the heightened awareness which has accompanied the theme with providing the impetus for more teachers to request the opportunity – professional development – to enhance their abilities to utilize these techniques.

> Rather than simply saying the kids are different than they were five or ten years ago, people realize that they have to do something proactive in dealing with that. Using the theme as a moving force, people can see that training or retraining in these various areas has helped them improve what they are trying to do. (March, 1992)

Despite these perceived benefits, one concern regarding the theme, a lack of valid assessment of the outcomes which are purported to stem from it, remains in need of improvement. This weakness was highlighted by both the theme facilitator who labeled it as "the big hole in the plan" (December, 1990) and by O'Hara who remarked, ". . . the objectives are not clearly outcome-based. The assessment is not as accurate, as clean as it should be, but we can work on the variants" (December, 1991). After three years of implementation, the relationship between the theme and the overall school plan is evolving, but a tight connection between the evaluation system and goals has yet to be forged.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have described the initial experiences of a school district that is attempting to restructure its schools. This venture was initiated by the central office administration as opposed to staff in the schools. This makes the district's effort to implement policies that increase parental choice and promote autonomy and programmatic distinctiveness at the school sites an interesting case for study. Few empirical reports have explored the implementation of centrally initiated reforms intended to stimulate bottom-up participation of teachers and parents (David, 1990; Goldring & Hallinger, 1992; Hallinger & Edwards, 1992).

The present analysis examined implementation of the district's controlled parent choice/magnet theme component at one school over a three year period. The focus for this report was on how this reform has changed the context for principal leadership. Consistent with prior commentary (e.g., Goldring, 1992; Murphy & Hallinger, 1992; Leithwood, 1992; Vandenberghe, 1992), the case study data suggest that the principal's role has been altered significantly under the new policy framework designed to support the district's restructuring. Two findings from this study seem especially noteworthy: 1) the principal's role as an environmental leader, and 2) the changing instructional leadership role of the principal.

Environmental Leadership

Several researchers have asserted that parental choice plans place a greater premium on the principal's ability to manage the school's environment (Crow, in press; Goldring, 1992; & Vandenberghe, 1992). Under a program of parental choice, there is a more direct relationship between the school's performance and the resources available to staff than in the typical public school system. In such contexts, these researchers have reported greater pressure on principals to legitimate the school's decisions so as to maintain community support. Moreover, they have suggested the need for principals to allocate more time and

effort to such activities.

In this case and consistent with the theoretical framework of Crow (in press), we have found increased pressure on the principal (and staff) to attract and retain students. As Crow has predicted, the principals have assumed the role of an "entrepreneur who must define, redefine, and maintain a market that is attractive to those making the choice" p.8. The parental choice program makes the principal explicitly responsible for marketing the school and its services. In this school, as well as in the other school that we have been studying, this has exerted an observable impact on the principal's time. At Eastside, both principals (i.e., Cameron and O'Hara) indicated specific ways in which the controlled choice plan has added new responsibilities (e.g., development of brochures) and extended the amount of time needed to fulfill past responsibilities (e.g., parent tours and meetings).

In addition, a recognition that the stakes for the school's performance have been raised has been implicit in the principals' remarks. The parental decision on whether or not to attend and/or remain at Eastside has introduced a direct form of accountability that has not been there in the past. These features of the school context, as well as the direct participation of parents on the school's Leadership Council, have made the principal more sensitive to parental beliefs, values, and perceptions.

This new emphasis on environmental leadership highlights capacities that are seldom included in principal preparation or inservice development programs. Issues concerned with marketing one's school have generally been considered trivial in educational leadership programs. Similarly, notions of customer service that are so prevalent in profit-making organizations seem increasingly relevant to both the tasks and ways that principals must think in this new context for education. Since parents are no longer subject to monopolistic dictates of public school systems, principals and teachers will need to see them as consumers and themselves as providers of a valued service.

With more direct accountability, it will benefit principals and teachers to understand how their actions are perceived by parents. The discrepancy between how educators and parents view schooling was illustrated in our data on the impact of themes on parent choices. As noted, it was Peter O'Hara's impression that the school's theme was not the major factor in parental decisions on which school to send their children. Yet, the whole parent choice plan has been predicated on that assumption! Data is currently being collected from parents to better understand their choice decisions. Regardless, it would be appropriate for aspiring and practicing principals to develop greater awareness of and sensitivity to the importance of external constituencies as well as some tools for dealing effectively with them.

The Changing Instructional Leadership Role of the Principal

At the outset of this paper, we alluded to recent assertions concerning the evolving role of principals as instructional leaders (Leithwood, 1992). While notions of transformational leadership are attaining increased popularity, there is no consensus on how the principal's leadership role changes in a policy environment that incorporates choice and magnet themes. Our data do, however, suggest that these features of the district's restructuring

have created a more complex internal system in the school. Specifically, implementation of the school's magnet theme assumes a much higher degree of interdependence and goal consensus than is typically found in schools.

This implies a need for greater coordination within grades, across grades and with the school's environment (e.g., grade level partners). At Eastside Elementary School, some of this coordination is not the sole responsibility of the principal. Program coordination is also accomplished through the efforts of the theme facilitator, members of the School Leadership Council, and the assistant principal. Thus, consistent with notions of transformational leadership, the principal's role has evolved, to some extent, into being a *leader of leaders*.

Early commentary on school restructuring implied that principals might simply act as managers in restructured schools (Carnegie, 1986). Empowered teachers would assume greater responsibility for instructional leadership. While responsibility for instructional leadership is clearly more diffuse at Eastside than in the past, this has not diminished the need for the principal's instructional leadership. With more people involved in educational decision-making, it has been our observation that there is an even greater need for the principal to understand the nature of educational processes and their impact on teachers and students.

As Leithwood (1992) has noted, the continuing evolution of this role is contingent on the decision-making context in which principals work. The data from this single case study would support the notion that the emphasis on instructional leadership which developed during the 1980s remains salient to the role that principals assume in restructured schools. However, these same observations support the need for additional capacities among those who lead restructured schools; capacities that go beyond the technical focus stressed during the 1980s (Hallinger, 1992b; Leithwood, Begley & Cousins, 1992).

The idea that principals will function increasingly as *leaders of leaders* accentuates the capacity of the principal to work effectively in group problem-solving. The ability to manage complex change in collaboration with other school-based leaders -- both parents and teachers -- is a skill that seems to be of paramount importance. This leads fairly directly to a recommendation for training that develops the ability of principals to identify the right problems and marshall the expertise of faculty towards productive solutions.

Less obvious, but at least as important is the need to examine the needs of school leaders in addition to the principal. While it is critical that principals obtain the leadership skills needed to effectively manage increasingly complex organizations, their effectiveness will be mediated to a significant degree by the capacities of those with whom they work. At Eastside, it has taken several years for the teacher leaders to *begin* to integrate the particularistic view of the school they have held as classroom teachers with the more general view needed for addressing the needs of the school as a whole.

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